Attorney Docket: 5171-132

EV141464332US

APPLICATION

FOR

UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

TITLE: SWITCHING APPARATUS

APPLICANTS: Gerard J. Matern
Arthur A. Patton

SWITCHING APPARATUS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to a switching apparatus for selectively engaging and disengaging a mechanism.

[0002] Chairs are known to have adjustment mechanisms for their various adjustable parts. For example, an angle a backrest makes with reference to a chair seat may be adjustable by an adjustment mechanism provided between the backrest and the seat. Similarly, the angle that the chair seat makes with reference to a seat support (and thus the floor) may be adjustable by an adjustment mechanism provided between the seat and the seat support. In order to control such adjustment mechanisms, a user operable switching apparatus may be provided.

[0003] A switching apparatus may employ a cam rotatable about a pivot by means of a handle. An example of such a switching apparatus is shown in U.S. Patent No. 5,356,200 to Stumpf et al. In certain designs, the cam must bear a significant amount of force and, over time, the cam face may wear down. Excessive wear on the cam face may result in loosening of parts and early breakdown of the switching apparatus. It is thus desirable to design a mechanism with reduced mechanical wear on its key parts. U.S. Patent No. 5,676,425 to Pernicka and U.S. Patent No. 6,394,550 to Liu attempt to address this issue with a bearing plate against which the cam bears. However, the problem of cam wear remains.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention provides a switching apparatus having a design intended to reduce wear on its key part. In an embodiment of the invention, a rotatable member is rotatably fixed on a pivot. A slidable bearing member has a first surface for engaging the rotatable member in a non-sliding manner, and an opposite second surface for slidingly

engaging an abutment. Any significant wear on the switching apparatus is more likely to occur between the slidable bearing member and the abutment, rather than between the rotatable member and the slidable bearing member.

[0005] In an embodiment, one of the rotatable member and the slidable bearing member includes a protuberance, and the other of the rotatable member and the slidable bearing member includes a corresponding indentation for engagement with the protuberance. The join formed between the protuberance and indentation provides a substantially non-sliding engagement between the rotatable member and the slidable bearing member.

[0006] In an embodiment, the rotatable member may comprise a cam having first and second cam faces for defining first and second rotational positions. The slidable bearing member may comprise a slidable bearing plate having first and second edge stops for defining its sliding limits.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] In the figures which illustrate example embodiments of this invention:

[0008] **FIG. 1** is a schematic side view of a chair embodying the subject invention.

[0009] **FIG. 1a** is a chair adjustment mechanism embodying the subject invention.

[0010] **FIG. 1b** is a partially exploded view of the chair adjustment mechanism of **FIG. 1a**.

[0011] **FIG. 1c** is a detailed view of an embodiment of a switching apparatus made in accordance with the subject invention.

[0012] **FIG. 2a** is a front elevation of the chair adjustment mechanism of **FIG. 1a** in a first position.

[0013] **FIG. 2b** is the chair adjustment mechanism of **FIG. 2a** in a second position.

[0014] **FIG. 3** illustrates a partial underside elevation of the chair adjustment mechanism of **FIG. 2b**.

[0015] **FIG. 4** illustrates an alternative embodiment of a switching apparatus made in accordance with the subject invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0016] Referring to **FIG. 1**, a chair **11** comprises a chair seat **13** and a backrest **15** supported on a backrest support bar **17**. The chair seat **13** and backrest support bar **17** are mounted to a chair adjustment mechanism **10** which may be used for adjusting the angle of the backrest **15** (backrest support bar **17**) relative to the seat **13**.

[0017] Referring to **FIG. 1a**, chair adjustment mechanism **10** includes a chair seat bracket **20** having mounting flanges **21a** and a mounting rod **21b** for facilitating connection of the seat bracket **20** to other chair adjustment mechanism components (not shown). The seat bracket **20** has first and second support walls **22, 24** for mounting an adjustment assembly, such as a locking assembly **25**, therebetween. The locking assembly **25** may comprise, for example, a slidable base **26** and a transversely mounted adjustment arm **27** which may be selectively engaged and disengaged from the slidable base **26**. In the present illustrative embodiment, a first tubular spacer **28** maintains a fixed distance between the slidable base **26** of locking assembly **25** and a stirrup-shaped bracket **40**, and a second tubular spacer **29** maintains a minimum distance between the slidable base **26** of locking assembly **25** and the second support wall **24**. The stirrup-shaped bracket **40**, which passes through slots in the first support wall **22**, has a compression function, as described further below.

[0018] Referring to **FIG. 1b** (which shows the chair adjustment mechanism **10** of **FIG. 1a** in a partially exploded view to provide the details of the switching apparatus) and **FIG. 1c**, a pin **38** passes in and through bores **40c, 40d** in the first and second arms **40a, 40b** of the stirrup-shaped bracket **40**, and in and through a bore **39** in the base **32** of handle **30** in order to pivotally mount the handle **30** between the first and second arms **40a, 40b** of the stirrup-shaped bracket **40**.

[0019] As shown in **FIG. 1c**, handle base **32** has a rotatable member or cam **34** that includes a first cam face **34a** and a second cam face **34b**. In the present illustrative embodiment, there is an indentation or notch **34c** in the nose or apex of the cam **34**, between

the first and second cam faces **34a, 34b**. The purpose of the notch **34c** is explained further below.

[0020] In the present illustrated embodiment, a bearing plate **44** includes a first flanged edge **44a** and a second flanged edge **44b**. As shown, flanged edge **44a** may have a suitably shaped flanged extension **44d** which extends generally towards the second cam face **34b**. A recess **34d** in the second cam face **34b** is sized to receive extension **44d** when the second cam face **34b** engages the bearing plate **44**. As will become apparent from **FIG. 2a** and **FIG. 2b**, below, the flanged extension **44d** may help guard against accidental pinching during operation of the chair adjustment mechanism **10**.

[0021] The bearing plate **44** is suitably dimensioned such that the bearing plate **44** is slidable between the first and second arms **40a, 40b** of the stirrup-shaped bracket **40**, to the extent that the first flanged edge **44a** and the second flanged edge **44b** allow. As shown in **FIG. 1b**, the first and second flanged edges **44a, 44b** may be dimensioned to act as stops by abutting an edge (the top edge or bottom edge) of the first and second arms **40a, 40b** of the stirrup-shaped bracket **40**. Bearing plate **44** perpetually engages cam **34** as detailed below.

[0022] Now referring to **FIG. 2a** along with **FIG. 1b** and **FIG. 1c**, with bearing plate **44** engaging cam **34**, a nose or protuberance **44c** of the bearing plate engages the notch **34c** in the cam **34**. When handle **30** is in a first position as shown, first cam face **34a** engages a first cam receiving surface **45a** of bearing plate **44**. As shown in **FIG. 2a**, when handle **30** is moved into the first position, the engagement between the nose or protuberance **44c** of the bearing plate **44** and the notch **34c** of the cam **34** slides the bearing plate **44** into its uppermost position between the first and second arms **40a, 40b** of the stirrup-shaped bracket **40**. Also, as shown, the flanged extension **44d** substantially guards any gap between the bearing plate **44** and the engaging cam **34** to help prevent pinched fingers.

[0023] The bearing plate **44** is shown engaging an abutment **46 (FIG. 2a)** which, in the present illustrative embodiment, comprises the enlarged head of shaft **48**. Shaft **48** bridges the first and second support walls **22, 24** and may be secured in position by a lock nut **50**. The stirrup-shaped bracket **40** has a central opening (not shown) which receives shaft **48** with a suitable clearance allowing free movement. Encircling the shaft **48** and located

adjacent to the first support wall **22** is a first coil spring **52**. As shown in **FIG. 2a**, coil spring **52** is in compression and biases a base **40**e of the stirrup-shaped bracket **40** away from the first support wall **22** and against tube **28**. This urges tube **28**, and slidable base **26** toward support wall **24**.

[0024] As the first and second arms **40a**, **40b** of the stirrup-shaped bracket **40** are pinned by pin **38** to base **32** of handle **30**, the first coil spring **52** thus also acts to urge cam **34** against the bearing plate **44**, and the bearing plate **44** against the abutment **46**. Thus, the stirrup-shaped bracket **40** has a compression function, and is hereafter referred to as compression member **40**. A second coil spring **54** encircling shaft **48** acts opposite to the first coil spring **52** and biases the slidable base **26** of locking assembly **25** away from the second support wall **24**. The first coil spring **52** is stronger than the second coil spring **54**, and thus provides sufficient force opposing coil spring **54** to keep the base of compression member **40** biased away from first support wall **22**. The maximum stand-off of the base **40e** from the support wall **22** is defined by the cam **34** and bearing plate **44** which are jammed against the head of shaft **48**, which in turn is jammed against the support wall **22**.

[0025] Now referring to **FIG. 2b** along with **FIG. 1b** and **FIG. 1c**, the chair adjustment mechanism **10** of **FIG. 2a** is shown with handle **30** lifted to a second position. As shown, the movement of handle **30** by a user causes second cam face **34b** to engage a second cam receiving surface **45b** of bearing plate **44**. As shown, the flanged extension **44d** is received within the corresponding recess **34d** in the second cam face **34b**.

[0026] In the present illustrative embodiment, the notch **34c** receives a cooperating protuberance **44c** in bearing plate **44** and this join is maintained as handle **30** is moved from one position to another. Thus, this join slides bearing plate **44** down as the handle **30**, and cam **34**, are rotated to the second position shows in **FIG. 2b**.

[0027] Still referring to **FIG. 2b**, the movement of handle **30** into the second position causes the distance between the cam pivot (i.e. pin **38**) and bearing plate **44** to be defined by the second cam face **34b**. In the present illustrative embodiment, second cam face **34b** causes the pivot pin **38** to move further away from bearing plate **44** than when first cam face **34**a engages bearing plate **44**. Thus, compression member **40** is pulled outwardly, in the

general direction of arrow **65**. The length of the stroke of compression member **40** is determined by the difference in distances from first cam face **34a** to pivot pin **38**, and second cam face **34b** to pivot pin **38**. In the present illustrative example, the length of the stroke of compression member **40** is indicated at **S**. This movement of compression member **40** also has the effect of compressing first coil spring **52** by the same distance **S**. Also, by action of coil spring **54** which extends by the same distance **S**, the slidable base **26** of locking assembly **25** slides towards first support wall **22** by the same distance **S**. However, the transversely mounted adjustment arm **27** does not move in relation to first support wall **22** (assuming that the adjustment arm **27** is non-slideably connected at its other end to another chair adjustment mechanism component). This relative movement between the slidable base **26** and transversely mounted adjustment arm **27** of locking assembly **25** may have the effect, for example, of engaging or disengaging a clutch mechanism (not shown) formed between the slidable base **26** and adjustment arm **27**. Thus, for example, **FIG. 2a** may illustrate a locked position wherein the transversely mounted adjustment arm **27** is locked relative to the slidable base **26**, and **FIG. 2b** may illustrate a corresponding unlocked position.

[0028] Referring to **FIG. 3**, the chair adjustment mechanism **10** of **FIG. 2b** is now shown in an underside elevation view with bi-directional arrow **68** showing a possible movement of adjustment arm **27** relative to slidable base **26** when the slidable base **26** is in an unlocked position. For clarity, only a portion of the adjustment arm **27** is shown in **FIG. 3**. In operation, the adjustment arm **27** may be coupled to another chair bracket component by, for example, mounting bolt **70** and matching nut **72**.

[0029] Bearing plate **44** provided between the cam **34** and the abutment **46** avoids sliding engagement between cam faces **34a, 34b** and abutment **46**. Instead, cam faces **34a, 34b** engage the bearing plate **44** in a rocking manner about notch **34c** so that it is the opposite surface of the bearing plate **44** that bears the brunt of the wear as it slidingly engages the abutment **46**. In this regard, the second face of bearing plate **44** should be made sufficiently smooth so as to facilitate smooth sliding of bearing plate **44** against abutment **46**, and be made sufficiently hard to resist wear. Even as the bearing plate **44** wears down, it does not reduce the ability of the mechanism to switch between positions. In other words, since it is the cam **34** that provides the key positional information for handle **30** and the

adjustment mechanism **25**, it will be appreciated that wear of the bearing plate **44** is less critical than wear of the cam **34**. Further, even should the bearing plate wear out, it would be less expensive to replace than the handle **30** and cam **34**.

[0030] In the present illustrative embodiment, the base **32** of handle **30** has flanged extensions **32a, 32b** which reduce the risk of pinched fingers.

[0031] An advantage of transversely mounting the adjustment arm **27** to the slidable base **26** of the locking assembly **25** is that the force necessary to arrest the motion in the directions indicated by bi-directional arrow **68** is not translated to the switching apparatus (since a force in the direction of bi-directional arrow **68** is substantially perpendicular to shaft **48**). Rather, the forces that bear on cam **34** and bearing plate **44** are largely provided by first coil spring **52** and second coil spring **54**. The light switching action made possible by limiting the magnitude of forces to that necessary to slide the slidable base **26** of locking assembly **25** in and out of locking position relative to the adjustment arm **27** also reduces wear on the first and second cam faces **34a, 34b** and notch **34c**, and on the bearing plate **44**.

[0032] While the present illustrative embodiment shows a notch **34c** provided in cam **34** which cooperates with protuberance **44c** provided on bearing plate **44**, this specific joining arrangement is not necessary. For example, rather than having a substantially flat cam receiving surface on the bearing plate **44**, the surface of bearing plate **44** could be slightly angled to form a shallow V-shaped valley having first and second cam receiving surfaces, as seen in **FIG. 4** at **45a', 45b'**. First and second cam faces **34a', 34b'** could then define a cooperating angled cam face, without notch **34c**, which rocks between the walls of the V-shaped valley formed by the first and second cam receiving surfaces **45a', 45b'**. In this case, the entirety of the V-shaped valley in bearing plate **44** can be characterized as an indentation, and the apex between the first and second cam faces **34a', 34b'** can be characterized as forming a protuberance. It will be apparent to those skilled in that art that various other embodiments are possible to substantially prevent sliding between the cam **34** and the bearing plate **44** while the opposite side of bearing plate **44** slidingly engages abutment **46**.

[0033] Also, while the present illustrative embodiment describes a rotatable member or cam having two faces, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that more than two faces may be provided (e.g. three faces), such that there are a corresponding number of rotational positions of the rotatable member which define a corresponding number of different distances from the pivot. This may be useful if more than two positions are required for controlling an associated adjustment or locking mechanism.

[0034] Furthermore, in an alternative illustrative embodiment, spacers **28**, **29** may be integrated with the design of the compression member **40** and/or the slidable base **26** of locking assembly **25**. If the compression member **40**, spacer **28**, and slidable base **26** are functioning as an integrated unit, the second coil spring **54** may be omitted.

[0035] Although springs are used throughout the above disclosure, other resilient members may be used in place of springs, such as resilient clips.

[0036] While the switching apparatus has been described as operating a clutch arrangement, (comprising the slidable base **26** and adjustment arm **27**) it will be appreciated that the switching apparatus may be employed to operate any variety of mechanisms.

[0037] The cam faces **34a**, **34b**, when flush against the bearing plate **44**, naturally act as a stop. In consequence, it will be apparent that the flanges **44a**, **44b** of the bearing plate **44**, which act as auxiliary stops, may, in some situations, not be needed.

[0038] The switching apparatus could function even if the cam **34** did not have faces which abutted the bearing plate **44** to define limit stops for cam rotation, provided the switching apparatus had some other cam stop, such as cam flanged extensions **32a**, **32b** hitting a respective flanged end **44a**, **44b** of the bearing plate **44**.

[0039] Other modifications will be apparent to those skilled in the art and, therefore, the invention is defined in the claims.